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ACTION ARA-01

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| INFO | LOG-00 | ACDA-17 | AID-01 | CEA-01 | CIAE-00 | COME-00 | CTME-00 |
| | C-01 | DODE-00 | DS-00 | EB-01 | EXIM-06 | E-01 | FRB-03 |
| | HA-09 | H-01 | INRE-00 | INR-01 | IO-19 | ITC-01 | JUSE-00 |
| | LAB-04 | L-03 | ADS-00 | NSAE-00 | NSCE-00 | OIC-02 | OMB-01 |
| | OPIC-08 | PA-01 | PM-01 | PRS-01 | P-01 | RP-10 | SCT-03 |
| | SIL-01 | SNP-01 | SP-01 | SR-01 | SS-01 | STR-18 | TRSE-00 |
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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4155
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
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USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM
USIA WASHDC 8764

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 10159

E.O. 12356: N/A
TAGS: ASEC, ELAB, PHUM, PGOV, PREL, VE
SUBJECT: REACTION TO THE RIOS ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

REF: (A) CARACAS 9665 (B) CARACAS 9423
(C) CARACAS 10121

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1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ CALLED AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF HIS CABINET TO DISCUSS HOW TO REACT TO THE SHOOTING OF EX-CTV UNION PRESIDENT ANTONIO RIOS, AND THE REPORTED DANGER OF FURTHER POLITICAL ASSASSINATIONS. MINISTER OF INTERIOR LUIS PINERUA AFFIRMED AFTERWARDS THAT THE SITUATION WAS UNDER CONTROL, AND THAT SUSPENSION OF CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES HAD NOT BEEN CONSIDERED BECAUSE IT WAS "NOT NECESSARY". THE GUNMAN IS IN CUSTODY, AS ARE SEVERAL OTHER ALLEGEDLY INVOLVED PERSONS. THE GUNMAN REPORTEDLY HAS TOLD POLICE

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THAT HE BELONGS TO THE "FUERZA BOLIVARIANA DE LIBERACION AL PUEBLO VENEZOLANO" (BOLIVARIAN FORCE FOR THE LIBERATION OF THE VENEZUELAN PEOPLE - FBL), A PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN GROUP. LAWYERS FOR THE IMPRISONED FEBRUARY 4 COUP LEADERS IMMEDIATELY DENIED THAT THE ATTEMPT OR GROUP HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH THEIR CLIENTS. MAJOR NATIONAL LEADERS OF ALL STRIPES HAVE CONDEMNED THE ATTACK, WHICH HAS PRODUCED A WAVE OF SPECULATION AND COMMENTARY AROUND THE THEME OF SUBVERSION. RIOS IS EXPECTED TO RECOVER. END SUMMARY

2. ADDITIONAL DETAILS HAVE BEGUN TO BECOME AVAILABLE ABOUT YESTERDAY'S ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT (REF C). TWO PERSONS DIRECTLY INVOLVED ARE IN CUSTODY: CESAR EDUARDO PENA LA CRUZ, FROM THE PROVINCIAL CITY OF VALENCIA, REPORTEDLY HAS TOLD POLICE THAT HE BELONGS TO THE "FUERZA BOLIVARIANA DE LIBERACION AL PUEBLO VENEZOLANO". HE WAS CAUGHT AT THE SCENE BY A PATROL OF METROPOLITAN POLICE WHICH HAPPENED, REPORTEDLY BY PURE CHANCE, TO BE PASSING BY. HE AFFIRMED TO POLICE AND PROSECUTORS HIS ADMIRATION

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FOR THE FEBRUARY 4 COUP LEADERS, BUT REPORTEDLY ADDED THAT THEY KNEW NOTHING ABOUT PLANS FOR THE ATTACK. (LAWYERS FOR THE IMPRISONED OFFICERS HASTENED TO ANNOUNCE THE SAME THING.) HE TOLD POLICE, ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, THAT HE RECEIVED THE WEAPONS FOR THE ATTACK (A .357 MAGNUM REVOLVER, AND A GRENADE THAT WAS NOT USED) FROM "ZACARIAS", ANOTHER MEMBER OF HIS "BOLIVARIAN" GROUP, WHO SUPPOSEDLY ALSO ASSIGNED HIM THE MISSION OF SHOOTING RIOS. PENA LA CRUZ ALSO REPORTEDLY SAID THAT RIOS WAS JUST THE FIRST OF A SERIES OF CORRUPT POLITICIANS MARKED FOR ASSASSINATION. IT IS NOT CLEAR AT THIS POINT WHETHER PENA LA CRUZ (34 YEARS OLD) WAS A UCV STUDENT, AS EARLIER REPORTED. HE HAD ARRIVED IN CARACAS FROM VALENCIA ONLY THE NIGHT BEFORE. HIS FAMILY, WHO WERE QUICKLY INTERROGATED BY POLICE, CLAIMED THEY HAD SEEN LITTLE OF HIM IN TWO YEARS AND WERE UNAWARE OF ANY "BOLIVARIAN" SYMPATHIES. TWO PERSONS WERE DETAINED IN VALENCIA IN CONNECTION WITH THE CASE, AS WAS THE OWNER OF A MOTORCYCLE SHOP IN CARACAS (PERHAPS THE SOURCE OF THE VEHICLE USED), WHO WAS FOUND WITH SUBVERSIVE LITERATURE.

3. POLICE ALSO DETAINED AT THE SCENE A UCV LIBRARIAN NAMED NORMA JOSEFINA AZUAJE VELAZQUEZ, 29, WHO WAS ATTEMPTING TO LEAVE THE AREA ON A MOTORCYCLE WHICH SHE WAS

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UNABLE TO START. SHE DENIED KNOWING PENA LA CRUZ, AND HE REPORTEDLY DENIED KNOWING HER, BUT "BOLIVARIAN" LITERATURE HAS SUPPOSEDLY BEEN FOUND IN HER APARTMENT.

4. PRESIDENT PEREZ IMMEDIATELY CALLED AN EMERGENCY CABINET MEETING WITH HIS MINISTERS OF DEFENSE, JUSTICE, COMMUNICATIONS, AND INTERIOR, PLUS THE COMMANDERS OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DISIP SECURITY POLICE AND THE TECHNICAL JUDICIAL POLICE. AFTERWARDS, MINISTER OF INTERIOR LUIS PINERUA SPOKE FOR THE GOV IN ANNOUNCING THAT "MEASURES ARE BEING TAKEN SO THAT SUCH ATTACKS DO NOT PROLIFERATE. THE SITUATION IS UNDER ABSOLUTE CONTROL...IT WAS A POLITICAL ATTACK...BEHIND IT IS AN ORGANIZATION WHICH IS BEING INVESTIGATED. THE SUSPENSION OF CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES HAS NOT BEEN CONSIDERED. IT IS NOT NECESSARY. (COMMENT: ONE SENSATIONALIST RADIO COMMENTATOR, ALEXIS ROSAS OF "RADIO RUMBOS", WAS HOWEVER SUSPENDED FROM CONDUCTING HIS REGULAR SHOW FOR ALLEGEDLY HAVING STATED IN SEPTEMBER 23 BROADCAST THAT ASSASSINS SHOULD HAVE TARGETED CAP.) IT IS CONFIRMED THAT THERE ARE PLANS TO ATTACK OTHER PERSONS. THE GOVERNMENT FACES THE NECESSITY OF PROTECTING THEM." ASKED ABOUT THE LEFTIST PARTY CAUSA R, WITH WHICH HE HAS BEEN FEUDING, PINERUA REPLIED "ONE DOES NOT VENTURE TO MAKE ACCUSATIONS WITHOUT HAVING PROOFS" (WHICH WE TAKE AS MEANING, THAT HE HAD NO PROOFS TO SUPPORT CAUSA R

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INVOLVEMENT).

5. PRESIDENT PEREZ ANNOUNCED SEPTEMBER 23 THAT HE "WOULD
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 SHOW NO RESPECT FOR ASSASSINS AND DISGUISED POLITICAL
 CONSPIRATORS". PEREZ ADDED THAT THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME
 IN THE HISTORY OF THE COUNTRY THAT PERSONS HAD TRIED TO
 BRING POLITICAL ASSASSINATION ONTO THE SCENE, AND THAT HIS
 GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT PERMIT THAT TO HAPPEN. (THE JUSTICE
 MINISTER MADE A SIMILAR COMMENT TO THE CHARGE, IN A
 SEPTEMBER 23 MEETING TO SIGN AN ANTI-DRUG LOA, SEPTTEL
 NOTAL. MINISTER JOSE MENDOZA SAID THAT THE ASSASSINATION
 MARKED A NEW AND VERY DANGEROUS ELEMENT IN THE SITUATION,
 BECAUSE VENEZUELA HAD NOT PREVIOUSLY BEEN CHARACTERIZED BY
 A CULTURE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE OF THIS NATURE. COMMENT:
 BOTH CAP AND MENDOZA ARE CORRECT AS REGARDS THE RECENT
 PAST, BUT WRONG ABOUT THEIR COUNTRY'S EARLIER HISTORY.
 FOR EXAMPLE, PRESIDENT ROMULO BETANCOURT WAS SERIOUSLY
 WOUNDED BY AN ASSASINATION ATTEMPT IN 1960; A CAR BOMB WAS

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USED AND SEVERAL PERSONS DIED.) CAP SAID THAT HE WOULD CONFRONT THE SUBVERSIVES, AS IN THE 1960'S. HE CONCLUDED THAT THE SUBVERSIVES HAD TRIED TO ORGANIZE DISTURBANCES ON SEPTEMBER 17 AND, HAVING FAILED, HAD "COMMENCED TO ORGANIZE ATTEMPTS AGAINST PERSONALITIES (LEADERS) OF THE COUNTRY WITH THE OBJECT OF GAINING BY MEANS OF TERRORISM WHAT THEY HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO GAIN THROUGH PUBLIC TURBULANCE." CAP'S REGULAR THURSDAY-MORNING RADIO SPEECH SEPTEMBER 24 (HE ADDRESSES THE COUNTRY EVERY THURSDAY) STRUCK THE SAME NOTES. CAP VISITED RIOS AT THE HOSPITAL THE EVENING OF SEPTEMBER 23. RIOS WAS SAID TO BE "OUT OF DANGER", BUT STILL FACES SURGERY TO REMOVE THE BULLET. PENA LA CRUZ FIRED TWO SHOTS BUT ONLY ONE STRUCK HOME, PASSING THROUGH RIOS' RIGHT ARM BEFORE STOPPING IN A LUNG.

6. THE ATTEMPT AGAINST RIOS WAS UNIVERSALLY CONDEMNED.
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RAFAEL CALDERA CALLED IT "A NEW DETERIORATION" OF THE SITUATION. SENATE PRESIDENT PEDRO PARIS SAID THAT POLITICS NEVER JUSTIFIED SUCH ACTS. COPEI PARLIAMENTARY LEADER HAYDEE CASTILLO DENIED THAT THE MEDIA WERE IN ANY WAY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ACT (FOR HAVING SPREAD SENSATIONALIST STORIES). GOVERNOR OF BOLIVAR ANDRES VELASQUEZ, LEADER OF THE CAUSA R PARTY, AFTER CONDEMNING THE ATTACK, DEMANDED A THOROUGH INVESTIGATION AND CHARGED ONCE AGAIN THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS WAGING A DIRTY WAR AGAINST HIS PARTY. CTV UNION LEADERS REFERRED TO A CAMPAIGN OF "PERSECUTION" THAT RIOS HAD ALLEGEDLY FACED, AND SAID THEY WOULD RAISE THE MATTER WITH THE ILO AND ORIT. RIOS' FAMILY SAID THAT THE ATTEMPT CONFIRMED THEIR BELIEF THAT THEIR FATHER HAD BEEN PERSECUTED AND WAS INNOCENT OF ANY WRONG-DOING. BUT AN OPPOSITION COPEI CONGRESSMAN, PACIANO PADRON, WHO HAS MADE THE CORRUPTION CASE AGAINST RIOS A PERSONAL CAUSE, TOLD THE PRESS THAT, "IF HE SURVIVES", RIOS' TRIAL SHOULD CONTINUE AND HIS PROVISIONAL LIBERTY (PENDING TRIAL) SHOULD BE REVOKED.

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